

Mr. RODRIGUEZ appeared at the bar of the House and took the oath of office, as follows:

Do you solemnly swear that you will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that you will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that you take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and that you will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which you are about to enter. So help you God.

The SPEAKER. Congratulations, you are now a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

□ 1145

WELCOME CIRO D. RODRIGUEZ

(Mr. GONZALEZ asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. GONZALEZ. Mr. Speaker, as the dean of the Texas delegation, it is a pleasure and a very great honor to introduce to the House our newest Member, the gentleman from Texas, CIRO D. RODRIGUEZ.

Not long ago, many of us mourned the tragic passing of our esteemed and loved colleague, Frank Tejeda. Yet, I think Frank would be happy to know that his work will be carried on by an individual like CIRO RODRIGUEZ.

Like Frank, Representative RODRIGUEZ has quite substantial legislative experience; and like Frank, he is a lifelong resident of the city of San Antonio. The gentleman also has that same deep commitment to the community, that same attachment to the people that he serves, and so I think we have in him a most worthy successor.

CIRO RODRIGUEZ served in the House of Representatives of the great State of Texas for 10 years and was an honored and valued member of that body right up to the time of his departure for today's swearing in. He was dean of the county's delegation and served with distinction on many committees, most particularly those that were related to public education.

He began his community service early. He was an educational consultant and he performed social work dealing with the problems of substance abuse and mental health concerns. He served on the local school board for 12 years before being elected to the Texas legislature.

Mr. Speaker, CIRO RODRIGUEZ brings to the House a deep knowledge of his community and long-seasoned experience in the House of Texas legislature. He brings to this House not only this knowledge and experience, but a heart filled with compassion and a soul filled with energy. He is ready to hit the ground running, and I feel certain that, beginning today, all of us will be finding that he is indeed a valued colleague and a very, very promising Member of the House.

I am very pleased and highly honored to introduce and welcome our newest Member.

READY TO BEGIN DUTIES AS NEW MEMBER OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

(Mr. RODRIGUEZ asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I know my colleagues put this function together just for me; right?

Let me first of all introduce my wife and my daughter. I want to ask them to stand up. Carolina, my wife, is a teacher, and we are real proud she got Teacher of the Year in San Antonio last year.

My daughter, Xochil. And my daughter, Xochil, is a 14-year-old. I also want to recognize some of the other members that have been real supportive, and I ask them to stand up for me today.

Let me just briefly thank my colleagues. There is no doubt that I am here with mixed emotions. I had the pleasure of being in high school when Congressman Tejeda was there, in the same high school in Harlandale. I had the pleasure of being in classes with him when we were in Saint Mary's University.

I also had the pleasure of being in the Texas House when he was in the Texas Senate. And I have had the pleasure of working on a variety of projects with him. And we all mourn the loss of Congressman Tejeda.

Today, I am also humbled in having been elected to this body. I know that my colleagues probably felt the same way I feel now, coming in, kind of in awe. It has not hit me yet. But I do want to thank all my fellow colleagues for allowing me to come in today and allowing my family to come in.

I do want to just indicate a few things. As I ran for office, one of the key things, one of the basic principles I have always had, when I ran for the school board 12 years ago, and I spent 12 years on the school board when I ran for the legislature, was that education is key.

I know President Kennedy once commented, in this same body 35 years ago, on the importance of human development, the importance of recognizing the individual, and in being able to do whatever we can to enhance the quality of that individual. I have always worked from that perspective.

I want to continue to work on that principle, that as far as I am concerned, as we move on to the next century, what is going to be the strength of this country is going to be its people, and we need to invest in ourselves and in our people. With that, come the investment in human development and investment in education and investment in training.

I want to take this opportunity to say it was a big honor for me growing up in San Antonio and having as my Congressman the gentleman from Texas, Congressman HENRY B. GONZALEZ. And for him to have given the introduction, I just want to thank him very much. I have always admired his hard work and his dedication.

So I say to my colleagues, I will be here representing the 28th Congressional District of the State of Texas, and I am looking forward to working with my colleagues. I will try to hit it running as quickly as I can. Muchas gracias.

QUESTION OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE

Mr. GINGRICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise to a point of personal privilege.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. (Mr. KOLBE). The gentleman from Georgia [Mr. GINGRICH] is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. GINGRICH. Mr. Speaker, I am standing here in the People's House at the center of freedom, and it is clear to me that for America to be healthy, our House of Representatives must be healthy. The Speaker of the House has a unique responsibility in this regard.

When I became Speaker of the House, it was the most moving day I could have imagined. It was the culmination of a dream. Little did I know that only 2 years later, I would go through a very painful time.

During my first 2 years as Speaker, 81 charges were filed against me. Of the 81 charges, 80 were found not to have merit and were dismissed as virtually meaningless. But the American public might wonder what kind of man has 81 charges brought against him?

Under our system of government, attacks and charges can be brought with impunity against a Congressman, sometimes with or without foundation. Some of these charges involved a college course I taught about renewing American civilization.

I am a college teacher by background. After years of teaching, it never occurred to me that teaching a college course about American civilization and the core values that have made our country successful could become an issue. However, as a precaution, I received the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct's approval in advance for teaching the course, and I accepted no payment for teaching the course.

Nonetheless, the course became embroiled in controversy. The most significant problem surfaced not from teaching the course but from answering the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct's inquiries.

Before the 1994 election, the committee asked questions, and I submitted a letter in response. The committee agreed that this letter was accurate. Later, I hired a law firm to assist me in answering additional questions coming from the committee. A letter developed by the law firm became the heart of the problem. I signed that letter, and it became the basis for a later, longer letter signed by an attorney. I was deeply saddened to learn almost 2 years later that these letters were inaccurate and misleading.

While the letters were developed and drafted by my former attorneys, I bear the full responsibility for them, and I accept that responsibility.